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September 14, 2012

Secretary Michael B. Donley
Department of the Air Force
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Donley:

I am writing to express my strong support for your consideration of Southern Arizona as the next home for the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). As the Air Force continues its process to determine the next round of basing decisions for the F-35, I am requesting a meeting with you to discuss the ability of the Arizona Air National Guard's 162nd Fighter Wing to deliver exceptional F-35 pilot training.

The 162nd Fighter Wing is a premier pilot training base. The unit maintains an exemplary service and safety record, with a high level of experience in its maintenance workers and instructor pilots. The F-16 was first based in Tucson in 1985, and since then the 162nd Fighter Wing has trained U.S. and international pilots to fly this multipurpose fighter. To date, the Wing has trained 24 of the 25 countries that fly the F-16, making the 162nd vital to our country's international training mission and uniquely qualified to continue collaboration with our allies and support F-35 training missions.

In addition to the proven assets of the 162nd Fighter Wing, Southern Arizona has unequalled access to airspace for military training and operations, providing pilots with state-of-the-art training capabilities in varied terrain and a realistic training environment. The Barry Goldwater range provides 57,000 cubic miles of airspace in which fighter pilots can practice air-to-air maneuvers and engage simulated battlefield targets on the ground. When our allies acquire the F-35, they will find no better place to train their pilots than at the 162nd Fighter Wing.

Additionally, the close proximity to installations including Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Yuma Marine Corps Air Station, Luke Air Force Base and Navy Station El Centro will allow pilots flying the F-35 to utilize the full combat capabilities of this fighter plane. Southern Arizona offers ideal flying conditions with more than 300 days of sunshine each year. This year-round flying weather will allow for virtually uninterrupted pilot preparation, with few cancelled training missions due to weather.

I have met with business leaders, elected officials, and members of our community and I know that there is widespread support for bringing the F-35 to Tucson. I look forward to discussing this with you further when we meet and will ask my staff to follow up with your office to confirm a mutually convenient time and date for our meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Barber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" and last name "Barber" clearly distinguishable.

RON BARBER
Member of Congress